

American

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No to Government Control of the Internet, Vice President Biden Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — Addressing a conference in London that is meeting to discuss how to make the Internet more secure, Vice President Biden said a proposed “international legal instrument” to govern the Web would stifle free speech and the ability of people all over the world to interact as they choose.

“What citizens do online should not, as some have suggested, be decreed solely by groups of governments making decisions for them somewhere on high,” Biden told delegates to the London Conference on Cyberspace November 1.

“No citizen of any country should be subject to a repressive global code when they send an email or post a comment to a news article. They should not be prevented from sharing their innovations with global consumers simply because they live across a national frontier. That’s not how the Internet should ever work in our view — not if we want it to remain the space where economic, political and social exchanges can flourish,” he said in remarks delivered by video teleconference.

According to press reports, China, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have called for the United Nations to set an international code of conduct for the use of information technologies, arguing that it would help ensure cybersecurity. But Biden said the United States supports the existing Convention on Cybercrime. He argued that the proposed code “would lead to exclusive government control over Internet resources, institutions and content and national barriers on the free flow of information online.”

The code of conduct “would lead to a fragmented Internet, one that does not connect people but divides them; a stagnant cyberspace, not an innovative one; and ultimately a less secure cyberspace with less trust among nations,” he said.

Over the next 10 years, more than 5 billion people, mainly in developing countries, will be joining the 2 billion who are already online, Biden noted. He said everyone should be able to use the Internet “without fear of being targeted by criminals or having their private information exposed or being punished by their governments for expressing their views online.”

There are ways of protecting people from cybercrimes and punishing those who commit crimes online “without resorting to a false solution that rationalizes government takeover of the Internet,” he said.

The United States is investing in cybersecurity and working with other countries to help them build up their own law enforcement capabilities in a manner that protects fundamental human rights like freedom of speech, Biden said.

Security excuses cannot justify “harsh crackdowns on freedom,” he said, noting that there are countries where bloggers are imprisoned and abused for criticizing their government and where Internet content deemed “politically unacceptable” is being censored.

The United States and many other countries “stand against these acts and for Internet freedom,” Biden said.

“The rights of individuals to express their views and petition their leaders, practice their religion, assemble with their fellow citizens online, we believe, must be protected,” he said. “These rights are universal whether they’re exercised in the town square or on a Twitter stream. They’re enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which applies to cyberspace just as surely as it does to every corner of every country on Earth.”

U.S., International Partners Meet to Support Afghanistan

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — Deputy Secretary of State William Burns says a meeting in Istanbul of Afghan officials, that country’s neighbors, near-neighbors and international partners was the “first clear, nationwide statement of support” for Afghanistan’s future stability and prosperity.

“It marks the first time — in one room, with one voice — that the countries of the region pledge to cooperate to build a more stable, prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan embedded in a stable prosperous and peaceful region,” Burns said in remarks to the conference November 2.

He said that Afghanistan has already begun “an ambitious transition to take responsibility for its security, pursue reconciliation and plan for its economic future.” The United States and other conference participants, he added, will continue to stand by Afghans as they work to meet the challenges ahead.

The United States and NATO have agreed to transfer full security control of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces to Afghan forces by the end of 2014, but also have pledged to provide support, training and assistance for the country’s security personnel for as long as necessary after the transition.

In addition to taking charge of the country’s security, Afghan leaders are working toward reconciling with former militants. Burns said all participating nations at

the conference committed to stand behind an Afghan-led process of reconciliation in which insurgents “renounce violence, abandon al-Qaida and accept Afghanistan’s Constitution — including the hard-won rights of women and minorities.”

Burns said that for this political agenda to succeed, all Afghans must be able to envision a more prosperous future.

“Across the region, lasting stability and security will depend on greater economic opportunities in people’s lives, and that depends on greater economic cooperation among the countries in this room,” he said.

The deputy secretary called on conference participants to work toward regionally integrated economic growth through the New Silk Road initiative, which would establish Afghanistan as a crossroads in a new network of regional economic and trade connections. Named for the ancient trade route, the plan would offer an economic boost to Afghanistan and its neighbors by bolstering trade across South and Central Asia.

The Istanbul conference, hosted by Turkey and Afghanistan, involved top diplomats from China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The United States, Japan and several European countries attended as supporters. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was scheduled to attend but canceled to be with her ailing mother, Dorothy Rodham, who subsequently died November 1. Burns was sent in her place.

The group will meet again December 5 in Bonn, Germany, to discuss progress made and next steps. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the Bonn meeting will focus on making the international community’s long-term commitments to Afghanistan “clearer and more specific.”

U.S. Participates in Iraq Trade Fair

Washington — For the first time in more than 20 years, the United States returned to Iraq’s largest annual trade fair in Baghdad, the State Department announced.

The 300-square-meter USA Pavilion themed “Partnering with Iraq” opened November 1 as the largest single-country representation at the 38th Baghdad International Trade Fair.

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey attended the opening session and inaugurated the USA Pavilion. Jeffrey emphasized the U.S. commitment to Iraq’s future

and the essential role U.S. businesses can play in helping Iraq and its people achieve their potential.

Deputy Secretary of State Thomas Nides said in a video message at the opening of the USA Pavilion that the United States and Iraq share an interest in expanding economic opportunities for Iraqis and for the region.

“We’re sending the message to the world that Iraq is open for business,” Nides said. “It’s time for the world to see Iraq as a country with an educated and diverse population and one full of opportunities to develop mutually beneficial economic partnerships.”

As a former business executive, Nides told the Baghdad audience, he fully understands the crucial role businesses play in building economies and in helping to rebuild lives after years of conflict and a dictatorial regime.

“The American businesses at this trade fair — and new businesses created by Iraqi entrepreneurs ... will create jobs, provide livelihoods and give hope to millions of Iraqis,” he said.

More than 80 U.S. corporations, universities, and travel and tourism organizations are showcasing their products and services to Iraqi businesses and people in an effort to expand trade ties between the United States and Iraq, the State Department said. Aviation, automotive and information technology companies listed in Fortune magazine’s tally of the 100 biggest businesses are represented at the trade fair, as are small and medium-sized businesses.

Nides told the audience at the opening that the United States and Iraq enter a new chapter in their relationship next year after the full withdrawal of U.S. military forces, but the U.S. commitment to the Iraqi people and their future remains unchanged. The United States recently opened consulates in Irbil and Basra and a diplomatic presence in Kirkuk, he added.

And the U.S. presence at the trade fair shows significant interest in the automotive, education, construction and information technology sectors, Nides said.

“The trade fair is expected to draw a million visitors and participants including Iraqi government dignitaries, direct end users, wholesalers, distributors, agents, students, opinion leaders and media,” the State Department said.

The Baghdad International Trade Fair continues through November 10.

Dempsey Calls for Increasing U.S. Partnership with Turkey

By Jim Garamone | American Forces Press Service

The following article was originally posted November 2 to the Department of Defense website.

Washington — The United States and Turkey are allies with common interests on most issues and an increasing partnership, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said at the 30th Annual Conference on U.S.-Turkish Relations here yesterday. Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey called for the relationship between the two countries to continue expanding, acknowledging that they won't always agree.

"As our partnership grows, ... we may have an occasional difference or two," Dempsey said. "That is OK. In fact, in some ways, this is healthy for two free and sovereign nations."

The biggest disagreement between the two nations occurred in 2003, when Turkey did not allow U.S. troops to transit its territory at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Turkey is at the crossroads that serves as a bridge between eastern and western Europe and the Middle East. It has had a vibrant economy as the rest of the region has undergone recession. With new governments emerging in the Muslim world, Turkey — a secular state with a majority Muslim population — can serve as a positive role model to leaders in the Middle East, Dempsey said.

The chairman echoed Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who spoke to the conference Oct. 31.

"I have to confess that some Americans, including quite a few on Capitol Hill, have questions about the future of this vital partnership," Clinton said. "And they wonder about its durability, and they wonder about the future role that Turkey will play in the region. I want to emphasize that the United States welcomes Turkey's growing role in the region and on the world stage."

"Now, we do not always see eye to eye," she continued. "In fact, no two nations — or two friends, or even two members of the same family — ever do. But we are confident that as Turkey assumes the responsibilities that come with increased influence, our partnership will become even more productive in the years ahead."

Turkey is a solid military ally that deployed a brigade to fight alongside U.S. troops in the Korean War, served as a steadfast ally during the Cold War and continues to play a constructive role with 1,800 service members in Afghanistan today, Dempsey said last night.

"Turkey has also positively engaged Iraq, working with

Iraqi leaders to reinforce that nation's emerging democracy and helping it rebuild," the chairman added.

Terrorists have targeted both Turkey and the United States, Dempsey noted, and the two nations continue to work together to combat terrorism.

"Rest assured," he said, "the United States stands with Turkey in this struggle, and we will continue to provide counterterrorism support and help crack down on terrorist activities around the world."

Dempsey extended the sympathies and prayers of the 2.2 million men and women in the U.S. armed forces for the loss of life and devastation of the recent magnitude 7.2 earthquake in eastern Turkey.

"We've been very proud to play even a small part in helping you recover from that," he said. "You know and can be sure that our country is committed to you as you recover and rebuild, and we're proud to call you our friends."

Dempsey said he is confident that the United States and Turkey will continue to focus on the common ground the two countries share to forge an even deeper partnership in the future.

"We must stay engaged and keep communicating," he said, "because as our already strong relationship grows in breadth and depth, we have to move beyond the world of labels. We need to move beyond the old paradigms of East and West, Christian or Muslim, New World or Old World, and on to building a bold and bright and new future together."

The chairman added a personal note, telling the audience that the day marked his one-year anniversary of being cancer-free. "Last year I had cancer," he said. "You can't imagine how that changes your perspective on things. It allows you ... to see things and empathize with people more than, perhaps, I'm sorry to say, I did before."

Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz attended the meeting after having met with Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta at the Pentagon earlier in the day.

"The two leaders discussed a broad range of mutually significant security issues, to include defense-industrial cooperation, foreign military sales, the common threat of terrorism and regional challenges," Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. John Kirby said in a written statement.

Panetta reassured Yilmaz of America's commitment to a strong security relationship with Turkey, praised Turkey's contributions to the training mission in Afghanistan and pledged to continue assisting in

earthquake relief efforts, should that support be required, Kirby added.

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